UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

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DPI/NGO/SB/90/36

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES OF THE 1990s AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

(Not an official record or press release. This Summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

On 20 December, 1990, Mr. Göran Ohlin, Assistant Secretary-General for Development Research and Policy Analysis in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA), briefed NGO representatives on the development challenges of the 1990s and International Development Strategy to be adopted by the General Assembly.

Discussing the International Development Strategy, Mr. Ohlin said that the strategy is essentially a statement of agreed principles and objectives for the international community relating to international development. The Strategy for the United Nations Development Decade had set more specific goals for an accelerated development of the developing countries, but these had for the most part not been met.

Reviewing past Development Strategies, Mr. Ohlin said they were adopted through arduous negotiations marked by intense political controversy. They had been highly rhetorical and out of touch with reality, even before they were adopted. He emphasized that the Development Strategy is not a treaty. It has not been ratified by parliaments, and it was questionable whether governments would consider themselves committed to significant changes in their policies.

According to Mr. Ohlin, the most recent Development Strategy is a document of the Post-Cold War era which takes into account recent political and economic changes. This Strategy sets an agenda which is up to date, realistic, credible and comprehensive.

Mr. Ohlin explained that the use of the Development Strategy as a reference piece is the most viable channel through which the Development Strategy can achieve its objectives. The Strategy will be referred to in development-related discussions and it also takes on an educational character.

Mr. Ohlin said that for the developing continents, the 1980s had been very different in the different regions. Africa continued its ominous slide into economic decline. Political instability and civil war made development virtually impossible. Latin America, caught in a debt crisis and political turmoil also experienced a tragic decade. Asia, in a very different situation, developed spectacularly well, not only the the four dragons -- Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea, but also India and China.

Many of the issues that have emerged in recent years were reflected in the Strategy, such as reforms in Eastern Europe, environment, human rights, science and technology. The private sector is also recognized as plying an indispensable and strategic role. The past development efforts in many countries have failed because too much reliance was placed on the public sector enterprise and state firms which have proved to be a burden on the public finances. This is why, Mr. Ohlin said, we are witnessing a great wave of privatization in the developing world. Mr. Ohlin concluded by saying that the Strategy's real contribution to international policy making is that it speaks the language of today, reflects a convergence of views, and suggests in the approach to the immensely complex problems of development a certain humility.